

F.I.S.T.S.

FIGHTING INJURIES sexual violence THREATS SELF-DEFENSE



SCREENING & COUNSELING GUIDE FOR

YOUTH VIOLENCE

Providers are encouraged to directly ask questions about fighting, injuries, sexual and intimate partner violence, threats, self-defense, and suicide as part of a standard violence related history in order to assess whether an adolescent's involvement in violence is low, moderate or high and the risk for further involvement in violence.

Based on the level of risk, providers can then discuss strategies for avoiding or resolving interpersonal conflicts with friends and peers as well as what constitutes a safe dating relationship.



*The FISTS mnemonic and information contained in this guide are adapted from *Recognizing and Preventing Youth Violence*, a handbook of the Massachusetts Medical Society.

1. How many fights have you been in during the past year?

2. When was your last fight?



FIGHTS

F I G H T S

Assessment of fighting is important because adolescents who report that they have been in more than two physical fights in the past year are at substantially increased risk for future violence related injury. For those adolescents who disclose a recent fight, try to get a more detailed account of the incident. Pay careful attention to how it started, what motivated this individual to fight, who else was there, whether a weapon was involved. Explore whether there could have been a non-fighting resolution and assess this youth's ability to resolve conflict easily. Ascertain whether the conflict has ended and what the risks of recurrence are.

1. Have you ever been injured in a fight?
2. Have you ever injured someone else in a fight?



injuries

I N J U R I E S

Asking questions about injuries can help in estimating the severity of previous fights. Patients who have been injured are more likely to be injured in the future because of unresolved conflicts.



1. Has your partner ever hit you?
2. Have you ever hit (hurt) your partner?
3. Have you been forced to have sex against your will?
4. Do you think that couples can stay in love when one partner makes the other one afraid?



sexual
& intimate partner violence

S E X U A L

& intimate partner violence

Adolescents are often reluctant to talk about violence in their relationships because they are afraid of getting hurt, or embarrassed, ashamed or confused. It is important to provide teens with a safe environment where they can feel comfortable speaking frankly about their experiences.



1. Has someone carrying a weapon ever threatened you?
2. What happened?
3. Has anything changed since then to make you feel safer?



THREATS

T H R E A T S

Asking questions about threats can help assess the types of situations in which the adolescent is involved, whether or not these situations contribute to the adolescent's victimization or involvement in violence, and the manner in which the youth reacts to a tense or threatening situation. If the youth is commonly involved in conflict, or reacts explosively to those conflicts, the youth is at higher risk of engaging in violent behavior.



1. What do you do if someone tries to pick a fight with you?
2. Have you ever carried a weapon in self defense?



SELF DEFENSE

S E L F - D E F E N S E

Asking about weapons in the context of self-defense facilitates a more candid response. In all cases, carrying a firearm indicates high risk. Carrying a knife is not as clearly identified with violent behavior. For example, a small pocketknife may or may not be considered high risk



LOW RISK

RISK BASED
INTERVENTION
& PREVENTION

LOW RISK

FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE

Indicators

- Has not been in a fight in the past year
- Does not report use of drugs
- Is passing courses in school
- Does not carry weapons

Intervention & Prevention Ideas

- Validate low risk behavior.
- Encourage teen to continue to resolve conflicts while successfully avoiding fights.

MODerate

RISK BASED
INTERVENTION
& PREVENTION

MODerate

RISK FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE

Indicators

- Talks about recent fight
- Struggling with schoolwork
- Reports other behaviors health care professional identifies as risky

Intervention & Prevention Ideas

- Take time to discuss the most recent fight and kinds of strategies that can be used to de-escalate future situations.
- Discuss anger management strategies and offer information about community resources.
- Consider referring this patient to a counselor to further discuss issues and risky behaviors identified.
- Consider discussing intervention ideas with parents.

HIGH RISK

RISK BASED
INTERVENTION
& PREVENTION

HIGH RISK

FOR YOUTH VIOLENCE

Indicators

- In frequent physical fights in a year
- Failing or dropping out of school
- Carries a weapon
- Reports illicit drug use

Intervention & Prevention Ideas

- Talk with family and patient about recent fights and discuss ways to avoid confrontations in the future. This may include anger management strategies, resistance and refusal skills, learning to walk away, and disassociation from a dangerous peer group.
- Referrals to the appropriate mental health or social service resources may be required.

If family or sexual
violence is indicated
two critical resources
in Virginia are:

**Family Violence and
Sexual Assault Hotline**
1-800-838-8238

**Child Abuse and
Neglect Hotline**
1-800-552-7096

If Suicide is
indicated call:
Suicide Hotline
1-800-273-TALK

FIGHTS

1. How many fights have you been in during the past year?
2. When was your last fight?

INJURIES

1. Have you ever been injured in a fight?
2. Have you ever injured someone else in a fight?

SEXUAL & INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

1. Has your partner ever hit you?
2. Have you ever hit (hurt) your partner?
3. Have you been forced to have sex against your will?

THREATS

1. Has someone carrying a weapon ever threatened you?
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SELF-DEFENSE

1. What do you do if someone tries to pick a fight with you?
2. Have you ever carried a weapon in self-defense?

SUICIDE

1. Do you ever have thoughts about hurting yourself?
2. Do you have a plan? Do you have access to what you would need to carry out your plan?

WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE

- Suicide threats
- Previous suicide attempts
- Alcohol and drug abuse
- Statements revealing a desire to die
- Sudden changes in behavior
- Prolonged depression
- Making final arrangements
- Giving away prized possessions
- Purchasing a gun or stockpiling pills

SUICIDE

SUICIDE

TO SAVE A LIFE...

- Realize someone might be suicidal.
- Reach out. Asking the suicide question DOES NOT increase risk.
- Listen. Talking things out can save a life.
- Don't try to do everything yourself. Get others involved.
- Don't promise secrecy and don't worry about being disloyal.
- If persuasion fails, call your mental health center, local hotline or emergency services.

In situations of immediate danger from suicide, call 911
If you - or someone you know - are having thoughts of
suicide call 1-800-273-TALK
Visit: www.preventsuicideva.org